DNREC produces wetlands report card on Leipsic River Watershed's health and management recommendations

DOVER – DNREC's Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Program announced that its final report on the health of wetlands located in Kent County's Leipsic River Watershed and Little Creek area – the eighth in a series of watershed-specific wetland health reports – has been given a C+ grade for their current condition, with opportunity for improvement. Tidal wetlands in the watersheds were in the best health of the four types evaluated, and received a B- grade overall, mostly as a result of a lack of grid ditching and undeveloped buffers.

The Leipsic River Watershed

In the summer of 2013, teams of wetland scientists from the program visited a total of 128 randomly-selected sites within the Leipsic River Watershed. Using condition assessment checklists and biological metrics, they found wetlands in the watershed were in fair condition, and that the most common stressors to them were invasive plants; digging, filling, and/or ditching of wetlands; and agriculture or development in the wetlands' surrounding buffer area.

DNREC's data was used to create a technical report on the Leipsic River Watershed that summarized not only the health of these wetlands, but also examined how wetland acreage has changed in recent decades, what value wetlands provide, and discussed how trends in land use have and will impact wetlands across the watershed. Land use in the watershed is dominated

by agriculture and wetlands, nearly three-quarters of which are saltwater wetlands that act as beneficial resources for both people and wildlife. Impacts to wetland health can diminish a wetland's ability to perform at full capacity to minimize flooding, control erosion, improve water quality, and provide a biologically rich habitat for plants and animals.

"Unfortunately, approximately 21 percent of this watershed's wetlands have already been lost due to human conversion into development and agriculture, and more recently natural conversion to open water along the coastline," said Alison Rogerson, DNREC environmental scientist and program lead for the Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Program. "But this opens an opportunity for citizens and landowners to benefit from restoring and protecting local wetlands by taking small steps."

Based on assessment results, DNREC made 12 specific management recommendations targeted at scientists, decision makers, and landowners. These included increasing citizen education and involvement through outreach, encouraging vegetated buffers around streams and wetlands, promoting protection and restoration of wetlands, updating decades old tidal wetland maps, and exploring innovative restoration techniques such as living shorelines.

The Leipsic River Watershed is composed of two sub-watersheds that flow into the Delaware Bay: the Leipsic River, which originates in Kenton and flows approximately 19 miles eastward through Bombay Hook National Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge; and Little Creek (also known as Little River), which flows for approximately eight miles through the town of Little Creek.

The wetland reports and the work of the Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Program are made possible by EPA Region 3 Wetland Program Development funding. To view the full report on Leipsic and Little Creek, the wetlands report card, and more

information on assessment methods, please visit http://de.gov/leipsicwetlands.

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